

Village Life

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Men

of social position are known by the number of *manyeta* 29/
(body rings worn on the waist) which they wear: [30/
one for a man or woman just "above the common"; 554]
six or seven for a man of high standing. A few women
have begun, to their own great discomfort, to wear
the immense coils of brass or iron on wrists or ankles
which are so popular among other tribes.

Clothes, says an acknowledged authority on the 29/
subject, make the man. Not among the Konde. 643
Chunga is a great chief, but his greatness does not 554
depend on what he wears, although there are occa-
sions when he dresses more carefully than at other
times. This almost naked man is regarded with a
reverence greater than is granted to any but a very
few Europeans, and out of all recognition greater
than is felt for the native who swaggers about in
boots and helmet and white man's clothes. The
respect which is accorded to a European depends
to-day (though it did not in the past) upon his personal
character, his control of resources, the authority which
has been bestowed upon him by others. But Chungu,
with hundreds of other chiefs throughout Bantu
Africa, has a respect which is gained in a totally
different fashion. He is in close touch with unseen
powers. His prayers have a compelling power, his
benediction is priestly, his curse of fearful validity.
He is a channel through which may come weal or
woe upon the land; and hence his authority depends
in no degree upon such an accident as dress.

By almost all who know them the Konde are re- 461 ●
garded as lazy. And to the bustling, and perhaps

- 461 unobservant European, village life affords abundant justification for the charge; while even the most observant and sympathetic must admit that they are, to put it mildly, a people with a large amount of unimproved leisure on their hands. There is, in truth, a good deal of idle lounging in the sun, and it is thoroughly enjoyed; and so long as it remains unproved that the restless energy of the white man has succeeded in securing the best possible conditions for the great masses of his race, just so long will some white men, and a vast majority of black, decline to admit that the African is altogether on the wrong path, and the European altogether on the right.

If the year has been a good one, the father has very little care upon his shoulders: his barns are well filled, and hunger is not likely to trouble him and his family; his children are healthy, and perhaps doing well at the little mission school; he has paid his tax, and the precious certificate, signed by the magistrate, is carefully laid away in some place of safety; his house is re-thatched, and will keep out the rain; his cattle and sheep and goats are away with the village herd, and looked after as part of the village property. If he wants a little money for immediate use, he can go to the nearest white man with a sheep or a goat for sale, or perhaps his wife will go with fowls or eggs, or a bunch of bananas. Finally, if he is religiously inclined, whether he is a Christian or not, he has probably been to church on Sunday, a fact which adds to his sense of personal well-being during the

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week. He has, then, no reason for doing any more work. Work has yielded him all that he requires, and he may lie in the sun and chat lazily, or move about strumming his *pango* (stringed instrument) with that supreme unconsciousness of being an idler, which is to some so irritating, to others so charming, a characteristic of the African. 46/0

All this, however, is ideal, and seldom corresponds to the actual fact. The year may have been a bad one; ill-health may have overtaken himself or his family; his cattle may be dying; or he may have failed to find employment after long trekking in search of it, and consequently his tax is unpaid and trouble is hanging over him. But a normal year, neither unusually prosperous nor unusually disastrous, will reveal how the Konde fill in their time. Let it be understood that they see nothing but folly in working for what they do not want. Working for what other people want is a high form of altruism to which only a small number of Konde have risen. That work increases the wealth of the country is a doctrine of high economics which they do not understand: wealth is increased by good harvests and by increase of live-stock.

The whole life of the community centres round the hoeing season. During the great heat which usually precedes the rains, the people move languidly about, incapable of anything like exertion. The men gather in groups and lie idly in the shade, talking languidly, droningly; an illness or a death; a 46/1 52/ 522

461 marriage settlement; the wealth some one has
521 brought from the South; or perhaps they exchange
522 impressions of Europeans they have worked for—a
subject into which a great deal of humour can be
packed; for it must not be imagined that the white
man is taken too seriously. His little foibles, his often
none too good temper, his haste to get a job done,
and above all his cool assumption of unquestioned
superiority, supply endless fun to the village joker.
“Bantu as she is spoke” by some Europeans gladdens
the weary hours for many a humorously inclined
native.

241 Should the rains be late, the situation may be
572 serious, for not only does the heat continue, but the
harvest will be correspondingly late, and there is dark
fear lest the supplies in the barns, intended to last
until March, should have to do until April is well on.

[783] Public prayer is offered, led by the chief. The pre-
liminary ceremonies have been attended to, and as
soon as the first rains fall all sally out with the first
streak of dawn to begin the year's work. From a
score of small crofts one may hear the long happy
shout of the men, and the shrill call of the women,
as they toil in the early morning; but as the day
advances and the heat increases, the shouting dies
away, and every one puts the last ounce of energy
into the task in hand. Henceforward, for about three
months, the native gives all his attention to his crops;
for as the season advances, and the grain begins to
grow, the weeds come up also in wild profusion, and

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Life is never dull for the African. There are marriages and funerals here as elsewhere; the former always a joyous occasion, the latter not always or necessarily the reverse. A walk through a populous village will bring one upon net making, pot making, basket or cloth weaving, and one may hear the sharp tap-tap of the bark cloth worker, or, in an iron-working district, the clang of the blacksmith's stone hammer, beating out hoes or spears upon a rough stone anvil. And many drive dullness away with beer. Sometimes it is a small party. A few friends gather in a house, and sit around a pot or two of beer provided by the wife of the host. They drink to the strumming of a *pango* or the beating of a small drum, for they like to have music at their feasts, even when only a few are gathered. But if it is a village feast, given by the chief, it may go on all night with terrific noise, shouting, singing, and drumming; and not always does the feast end without fighting.

Sometimes the villagers receive visitors. The native evangelist on his rounds is always hospitably welcomed. The tax collector is not exactly welcomed—who ever welcomes a tax collector!—but he is received well enough, for his coming has at least this advantage, that those who are ready to pay the sum demanded will not have to go later and pay at the *boma* (magistrate's office), which may be a long distance away. Sometimes a native trader comes along, his packs carried by attendants, for he never carries them himself, even when beginning on a small scale. Visitors